



After Action Review of DREF Operation # MDRAF002 – Afghanistan Floods and Landslide (2014)

Commissioned by IFRC and ARCS

Funded by IFRC and Canadian Red Cross

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1.0 Executive summary

The Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS) has a long and rich history of response to natural and manmade emergencies. Through its 34 provincial branches and thousands of volunteers, it benefits from nationwide coverage. Its reputation, acquired through eighty years of credible, neutral, impartial, and independent humanitarian actions have allowed the ARCS to negotiate and maintain unparalleled access to beneficiaries, even those located in the most volatile areas of Afghanistan.

Afghanistan itself is prone to a variety of emergencies, including situations of violence and meteorological disasters. The North and North-East regions are particularly vulnerable to recurring floods and landslides. 2014 was no exception and heavy rains severely impacted over 90,000 individuals, beginning in March. The ARCS quickly responded to the resulting flash floods by distributing its pre-positioned emergency relief items as well as dispatching mobile health teams (MHTs) to the affected areas. On May 2nd, 2014, a landslide occurred in the district of Argo, Badakshan province. This landslide was heavily mediated, with deaths reported as high as 2,700. Rapid assessments quickly determined that those reports were wildly exaggerated. The decision was namely taken to launch a DREF operation, mainly to replenish stocks used by ARCS in its ongoing response.

The plan of action of this DREF requires the completion of an After Action Review (the Review). This paper presents the findings of this review and concludes that the DREF allocation, although it was not required given the amount of resources available to the Red Crescent in country, and even if launched as a result of media pressure, with a view to capitalise on potential donor interest, and with little technical input from the ARCS, did leave the ARCS in a better position to cope with upcoming disasters.

The review further concludes that the relief operation managed by the ARCS was **timely** (especially in its initial phases), **appropriate** in meeting the life-saving needs of the beneficiaries assisted and **effective**, in that it contributed to alleviating suffering and to the prevention of water-borne diseases. The health interventions, and namely interventions by the MHTs, were particularly effective. The distribution of relief items was overall more challenging.

This report identifies **opportunities for further strengthening of ARCS and IFRC** response mechanisms, namely in areas of planning, coordination, and delivery of relief operations. The review proposes a number of recommendations to reinforce in these areas.

The Reviewer wishes to **thank the ARCS, IFRC and ICRC** for their collaboration and openness to share information.



Haji Abdul Hamid, DM coordinator for ARCS North region, pointing areas affected by the 2014 floods and landslide, 26 Aug 2014

2.0 References

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- B. DREF Procedures and Guidelines, version 3.00, 01Jul 2011, with annex guidelines for use of DREF (2011)
- C. IFRC Principles and Rules for RC/RC humanitarian assistance, Oct 2013
- D. DMIS reports, Flooding in Afghanistan, 02 May 2014-09 Jun 2014
- E. IFRC Info bulletins, Flash Floods and Landslides, 30 April 2014, 03 May 2014
- F. IFRC EPoA – Afghanistan Floods and Landslides (DREF Operation # MDRAF002), 10 May 2014
- G. IFRC Ops Update – Afghanistan Floods and Landslides (DREF Operation # MDRAF002), 18 June 2014
- H. E-mail log related to Afghanistan floods and landslide, 17 March 2014-22 May 2014, compiled by IFRC Afg DM
- I. ARCS Strategic Plan 2012-2015
- J. ARCS DM department strategy 2014-2015
- K. ARCS DM SOPs valid at time of DREF, Sept 2007
- L. ARCS revised SOP, draft dated May 2014 (under development)
- M. IFRC Afghanistan Long Term Planning Framework 2012-2015
- N. IFRC Afghanistan Annual Report 2013 (MAAF001)
- O. IFRC review of Afghanistan Floods Operation [Appeal # MDRAF001], December 2012
- P. Baseline Evaluation of ARCS DM and Organisational Capacity, by Canadian RC, May 2013
- Q. ARCS OCAC Findings Report, May 2013
- R. ARCS Disaster Response Capacity Evaluation (DRCE), December 2013
- S. AAR Quick guide and compendium, CRC
- T. CRC project for Strengthening Emergency Relief and Disaster Response Capacity of ARCS – PIP 2013-2017

3.0 Background

The Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS) has been established in 1934 with an aim to alleviate human suffering and provide support to the victims of man-made and natural disasters all over Afghanistan. It has remained operational ever since, including during the last three decades of conflict. It consists of 1,800 staff and approximately 23,000 volunteers operating out of 34 provincial branches and seven regional offices (three of which are collocated with IFRC sub-delegations). It is supported in its mandate by an IFRC Country Office as well as other National Societies including the Canadian, Danish and Norwegian and Qatar RC providing support to DM, Health/OD and Log respectively, respectively. ARCS has programs in health (including fixed clinics and mobile teams), DM, Humanitarian Values, Social Welfare, Youth and Volunteers as well as for its own Capacity Building.

In the North and North-East regions (the focus of this Review), floods and droughts are recurring on an annual basis and the ARCS has a long history of responding to those emergencies, in close collaboration with provincial and regional relief committees made up of GoA, UN and NGO representatives. Those responses are made more complicated by the presence of a growing and more fragmented number of Armed Opposition Groups (AOGs), some areas being only accessible to RC Movement actors. In 2012, ARCS launched its first Emergency Appeal related to a flood emergency in the North¹. In 2013, it released an information bulletin related to floods affecting 2,472 individuals and managed to respond using its own assets. In 2014, however, the floods were more severe, severely affecting at least 90,000 individuals, of which 16,000 have been internally displaced. As per most years, the ARCS branches started responding to the needs at the local level in late-March. A first landslide happened in Takhar province on 13 April, resulting in one loss of life. ARCS distributions of NFIs and dispatch of mobile health teams continued throughout April, complemented by distribution of food items managed by ICRC. On April 29th, IFRC reiterated that it was ready to assist ARCS as required, including with the provision of NFIs from its contingency stocks in Kabul².

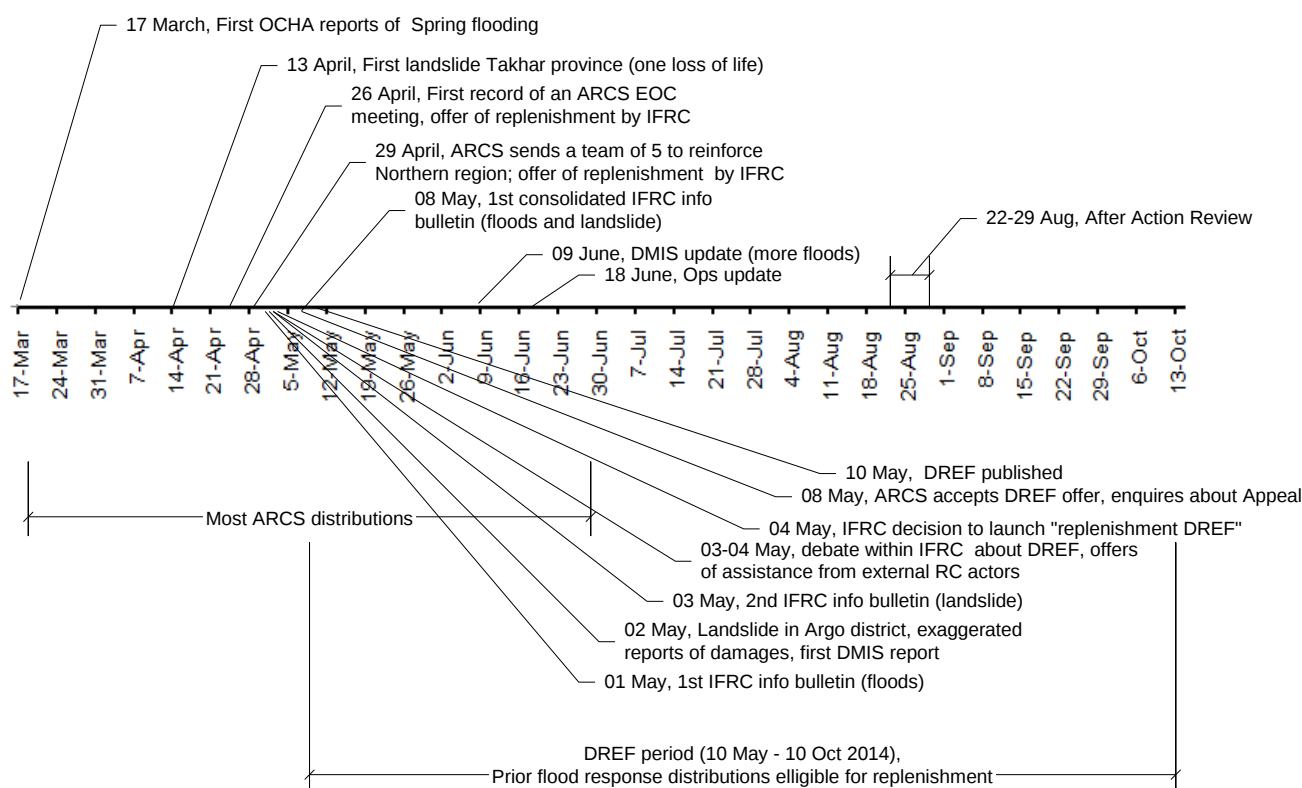
The situation changed rapidly on May 2nd, when the village of Abe-Barak, Argo district, Badakshan province was hit by a landslide. The Governor and some major media outlets started to report large number of dead (up to 3,000) and displaced. The pressure for a larger-scale response quickly grew despite the fact that it became clear that the initial reports had been exaggerated. On May 3rd, IFRC Afg DM urged restraint but for a variety of reason (see section 7) a

¹ Appeal # MDRAF001 seeking CHF 1,186,873 to assist 14,000 beneficiaries for six months, mostly in the Sar-e-Pol province of Northern Afghanistan. The Appeal was later revised to CHF 1,017,115 and the subject of a review (ref. O).

² There had been internal discussions already between IFRC APZ and IFRC Afg delegation about a possible DREF, but the idea was not pursued given the amount of stocks and funds available in country (ref. H, exchanges on April 26th).

DREF operation was designed and published on May 10th. The DREF (ref. F), which is the subject of this review, allocated CHF 289, 201 to fund ARCS response, including replenishment of stocks already distributed. The overall number of beneficiary covered by the DREF operation is 2,500 families (90,000 individuals). Main areas of intervention are Health and care (mobile health teams, psychosocial support and CBHFA), Water and Sanitation (distribution of water tablets, hygiene kits, hygiene promotion), emergency shelter (tools and basic shelter materials), as well as the general distribution of Non Food Items to 2,000 families.

4.0 Timeline



5.0 Objectives of the review

This after action review is one of the activities planned under the PMER section of the DREF. It was scheduled to take place during the fifth month of operation (September 2014). As per reference A, the objective of the review was to:

- Assess the effectiveness and appropriateness of the ARCS response to the floods and landslide;
- Review the flow of information regarding the operation inside the organisation, as well as to external parties;
- Examine if the DREF was appropriate to both humanitarian needs of the affected areas and the capacities of ARCS;
- Review support and resources provided by RC/RC Movement, did they meet the needs of ARCS;
- Assess key achievements, areas of success and challenges, as well as areas for improvement within the operation; and
- To identify lessons learned and good practices, and provide recommendations to replicate or improve for future disasters responses.

The expected deliverable of the review is a concise review/evaluation report which will be shared with stakeholders, including ARCS and IFRC management.

6.0 Methodology

Approach. The information required for this report was gathered from a review of the available documentation pertaining to the flood and landslide emergency (including a log of e-mail communications, ref. H), combined with key informant interviews collected in Kabul and Mazar-e-Sharif between August 23rd and 28th, 2014 (see list below). Whenever appropriate, the AAR quick guide and compendium methodology was followed (ref. S).

Constraints and limitations. The short duration of the field visit did not allow consulting with the provincial branches nor with the beneficiaries (which would have been unlikely given the security situation in most of the areas of ARCS interventions). Although it would have helped corroborate some testimonies, this level of consultation did not prevent meeting the objectives listed above. Another limitation comes from the fact that some limited aspects of the DREF operation are still ongoing, to be concluded by October 10th. The AAR therefore took place after 80% of the operation timeline had been elapsed (including the vast majority of MHT interventions and relief distributions).

Key informant list.

IFRC Asia Pacific Zone (APZ):	Ops coordinator covering Afghanistan (by phone)
Afghanistan RCS (ARCS) HQ:	DM Deputy Director (Disaster Response) ³ DM Deputy Director (Disaster Prep. and DRR) DM officer in charge of response (focal point for DREF) Health – Emergency Health Manager Health – CBHFA Manager
IFRC Afghanistan Delegation (IFRC Afg):	Program Coordinator (Acting HoD at the time of review) Former Program Coordinator (in position in May, by phone) Senior Health Program Officer DM delegate Health Program Manager PMER delegate
Norwegian RC (offering log support to ARCS):	Country Representative Log delegate
Canadian RC (offering Project Coordination support to ARCS):	Project coord and compliance delegate
IFRC Mazar Sub Delegation (covering North and N.East):	Manager of the Sub-Office Regional DM Officer Regional Health Officer Regional Log Officer
ARCS Mazar Regional Office (covering North region):	Head of Region Regional DM coordinator Regional Health Coordinator
ICRC Mazar sub-del. (covering 9 provinces in North):	Head of Sub Delegation

³ Attempts were made to meet in person and on the phone with the DM director but it did not happen during the short visit. The Sec Gen was contacted during the review and expressed his support and thanks to the IFRC.

7.0 General observations

Disclaimer: The observations presented hereafter represent the views of the Reviewer based on the information available at the time of writing. The Reviewer takes sole responsibility for the content of this report.

Rationale for launching the DREF.

As per the “background” section, it is clear that the DREF would never have been launched if it had not been for the attention caused by the international media reporting that between 2,700 and 3,000 Afghans had perished in a landslide in the village of Abe-Barak on May 2nd ⁴. Those media reports were based on proclamations from local authorities and turned out to be wildly exaggerated. Soon after the landslide, the ARCS branch president as well as the regional OCHA representative assessed that no more than 150 affected families still required assistance. Some media outlet, including CNN, retracted their stories but the authorities would not. Both IFRC Afg delegation and ARCS also concluded by May 4th that the in-country stocks would suffice to respond and that there was no need for external support beyond what replenishment was being offered by partners already in country⁵. This is especially true of the emergency health programs, funded over 110%.

The pressure for IFRC to intervene, however, kept building, as suggested by messages from the Director of Asia-Pacific Zone (in Geneva at the time, May 4th) as well as from some NS wanting to contribute and even to deploy to the region. There was also likely a desire to capitalize on the media coverage (i.e. as a lever to generate funding for a DREF, possibly even an Appeal). The concluding argument from APZ was that the DREF was a way to demonstrate material support to ARCS by IFRC, as opposed to leaving it to the PNS to fill the gap, which might be /perceived as a lapse in Federation engagement⁶. Since ARCS had been distributing NFIs to both floods and landslide victims since April, the DREF idea was presented to them as a “replenishment DREF only” and they were sold to the idea on May 8th.

Technically speaking, however, there is no such thing as a “replenishment DREF” without the same requirements as any other DREF. The replenishment of stocks used for emergency response is an eligible activity within a DREF but all DREF requests still require the same multi-sectoral EPoA, budget and rigor in delivery, monitoring and reporting as any operation, contrary to initial indications from APZ⁷. It was the opinion of IFRC Afg DM that the ARCS did not have the capacity to undertake this properly⁸. A DREF was nonetheless put together, mostly by IFRC APZ DMU and PMER and launched on May 10th (8 days after the landslide).

This DREF met the some of the basic requirements set forth in the DREF procedures (ref. B, section 5.2) in that it was meant mostly to replenish stocks that had been used in emergency response (to the floods and landslide). It was also launched within the required time period (criteria 5.1). It did not however meet the following requirement of the DREF guidelines: “When sufficient bilateral assistance and national funding is available to meet the needs of the people affected, a DREF should not be requested and will not be approved” (ref B, annex, page 6). In this case, evidence shows that enough in country and bilateral support was available to ARCS from exiting IFRC stocks and partner budgets.

In conclusion, although the DREF was (1) launched without proper assessment (following the landslide) and mainly due to media pressure/perceived opportunities for funding, (2) driven by IFRC and somewhat imposed to ARCS, and even if (3) there was enough support available to the ARCS to respond without the DREF allocation, the operation that it ended up replenishing (i.e. response to the 2014 floods overall) was relevant and appropriate⁹. In addition, most of the bilateral support that would have otherwise been offers to ARCS remains available for future emergencies¹⁰ while the DREF acted as a catalyst for others to offer funding¹¹. In this

⁴ Opinion shared by all from the IFRC APZ DM down to the ARCS Regional Office, and myself when I review the communications log, ref. H.

⁵ As well as the Chinese government who gave USD50k from its embassy to ARCS, as well as 150 tents from Iran and “some support” from Qatar RC.

⁶ Message from IFRC Afg delegation to IFRC APZ and others, 04 May 2014.

⁷ IFRC APZ DM originally indicated on May 5th that the “replenishment DREF” did not require the completion of section C: Detailed Operation Plan. This was later retracted.

⁸ Message from IFRC Afg DM to IFRC APZ DM

⁹ 83% of the DREF budget reimburses the ARCS for costs already incurred in the response, the other 17% for ongoing activities, mainly in the health sector (CBHFA trainings and Mobile Health Teams)

¹⁰ Namely from Norwegian, Finish and possibly Canadian RC

¹¹ ECHO - CHF 144,601; Canadian RC/Govt DFATD - CHF 24,675; Spanish RC/Govt AECID - CHF 24,600

regard, the DREF did add some value and ARCS finds itself in a slightly better position to respond to the next disaster.

Effectiveness of ARCS response.

As neither the Federation nor the PNS have an operational mandate in Afghanistan, the RC response to the floods was delivered almost entirely by ARCS¹². ARCS has, over time, built itself to be in a privileged position when it comes to assisting vulnerable population. Its network of branches and volunteers at the community level provide **unparalleled geographical coverage** and the reputation it has built over the years, through credible, neutral, independent and impartial humanitarian action (NIIHA) allows **access to areas where AOG are active**. Such an access is not possible for other UN and NGO agencies. The fact that ARCS **pre-positions stocks and mobile health teams** in a number of communities allows for a **timely initial response**.

These factors created the position for ARCS to have early and sustained success in providing assistance to communities. The 2014 flood relief actually provided the opportunity for the ARCS to expand its reach and assist communities that had not been accessible since as far back as 2003. This access was granted through engagement with AOG and other stakeholders. In fact, it transpires from many of the inter-agency relief committee meeting minutes that most (if not all) of the hard to access areas have been allocated to the ARCS. In those villages, the ARCS delivered NFIs, medical services (through its mobile teams), as well as hygiene promotion and psycho social services¹³. The mobile health teams were particularly effective. In fact, **the entire health package (including CBHFA, MHT and PSS) was well designed, well integrated and well implemented** (see finding 3). That being said, there is room to improve on the pre-positioning of materials managed by the health team (including water purification tablets and sachets as well as hygiene kits).

On the DM/relief Distributions side, the ARCS did encounter (and continues to experience) challenges. Reporting on distribution and stock levels appears to lack consistence and is sporadic¹⁴ (see finding 4) Pre-positioned stocks, although allowing for a “head start” quickly ran out and resupply has been a challenge, in part due to delays in orders and damages to roads. Stocks needing to be procured outside of Afghanistan have a delivery time of over two to five months. For this reason, many key activities have been delayed, including the distribution of water purification tablets and sachets, which was planned to start shortly after the Review. The amount and types of pre-positioned items (although in a steady state of improvement) is also relatively small and incomplete. NFI packages are also inconsistent between provinces and districts. At the time of writing, the ARCS had delivered the following relief items and health services, supported by the DREF. Those relief services would have probably been provided regardless of the launch of a DREF but this would have stretched the internal resources of the ARCS and would have likely resulted in difficulties in reporting (see findings 4, 5 and 6).

Table 1: NFI distributions as of 04 Aug 2014 (most recent data available)

Province	N# of HH	Tents	Tarpaulins	Kitchen set	Jerry cans	Blankets
Badakhshan	864	457	865	74	123	2304
Baghlan	200	200	100	150	0	200
Bamyan	77	77	64	61	61	110
Ghor	37	37	37	37	74	148
Jowzjan	212	87	212	212	324	848
Kabul	73	73	73	73	73	292
Kapisa	41	13	27	27	27	108
Kunar	3	3	12	3	3	12
Logar	128	0	0	128	128	512
Parwan	13	13	13	13	13	65

¹² ICRC did run some distributions, generally employing ARCS staff

¹³ Although it was not possible to witness those activities directly or to engage with beneficiaries, and despite the fact that final beneficiary lists were not yet available (only consolidated numbers by province), the claims of ARCS were corroborated by the head of ICRC sub-delegation, which maintains a network across all affected provinces.

¹⁴ Including sometimes diminishing cumulative reports of distributed stocks over time

Sar-e-Pul	151	60	154	141	151	604
Takhar	318	192	254	94	77	1288
	2117	1212	1811	1013	1054	6491

Table 2: Overall health services provided until 30 May 2014 (most recent data available).
1,030 Hygiene kits were also distributed (see finding 9)

Service	Number of beneficiaries
OPD	5,712
Dressing of wounds and first aid	386
Health education	12,617
	18,715

In conclusion, based on operational reports and testimonies, it is clear that the ARCS response to the floods was both timely (especially in its initial phases, before the ruptures of stocks), appropriate in meeting the life-saving needs of the beneficiaries assisted and effective, in that it contributed to alleviating suffering and to the prevention of water-borne diseases¹⁵.



A ARCS vehicle fords a flooded riverbed

Ownership of the DREF operation.

One of the themes that dominated concerns of informants had to do with the ownership of the DREF operation. As mentioned above, the DREF allocation was presented as a “simple replenishment DREF”. It was accepted by ARCS as a tool to receive funding and stocks to replenish and sustain the ongoing flood and landslide relief operation. A detailed emergency plan of action (EPoA) and budget was then developed by IFRC PMER and DMU based on partial information and with little input or ownership from those responsible for the delivery (at the branch and regional level). In fact, most informants at the branch or regional level have explained that the first time they saw the DREF plan, it had already been published. Staff and delegates from Kabul that were dispatched to roll out the DREF operation reported that this has caused “some confusion”. It also likely contributed to some unrealistic budget figures (see finding 10).

The scope of the DREF is also confusing to the implementation level. It is basically written as a theoretical operation (from the conduct of assessment to the AAR), but was developed at a time when many activities had already been completed. For example, when it mentions “procurement and distribution of relief items”, it could have instead referred to

¹⁵ The review could not assess the efficiency of the operation (in terms of cost-benefit) as real-time budget tracking fell outside the scope of the review.

“continuation of distribution and replenishment of relief items”. This applies to most activities. When the DREF was unveiled to ARCS, it led departments to think they had to start a new operation as it had not been properly framed in time. This also contributed to lack of ownership.

The fact that the EPoA was drafted by IFRC may be explained by time pressures and concerns over the capacity of ARCS to do so. As a result, however, it is proving and will continue to prove more difficult to receive adequate reporting on the operation as some components of the ARCS (understandably) do not have solid ownership of the DREF operation.

8.0 Specific findings and recommendations

Finding 1 – Anticipation of needs. Many disasters occurring in Afghanistan have a history of recurrence and are predictable¹⁶. Provinces in Afghanistan are as such classified by ARCS as being at either High, Medium or Low risk of suffering from natural and man-made emergencies. This is reflected in the ARCS DRR plans as well as the ARCS emergency stocks pre-positioning strategy. Despite this, the Annual Work Plans of the ARCS (and IFRC) do not have provisions for sufficient preparedness for disaster response. Pre-positioned stocks, although they exist in every branches, are minimal (enough to assist between 150 and 300 households) and reserves in Kabul are also thin¹⁷. The Federation no longer has stocks outside Kabul as those were permanently handed over to ARCS in Feb/March 2014. According to IFRC Afg delegation, this is in part due to a reluctance of donors to fund pre-positioned for disaster response. As a result, the ARCS needs to scramble to procure relief assets from partners every time a medium scale disaster happens, often leading to a rupture of stocks that bring relief operations to a halt. The types of item also available also needs to be improved. For example, WatSan kits 2 have been identified as a priority by the health team but are not yet widely available. **Recommendation: This vulnerability has already been identified by the ARCS and the Canadian RC project for strengthening the disaster response capacity of ARCS (see ref. T). ARCS should be encouraged to develop a more robust plan for emergency response preparedness and donors should be encouraged by IFRC to contribute to this plan. This plan should be joint between relevant departments (namely health and DM). The provision of 10,000 NFI kits planned under the Canadian RC project for 2015 should also be processed as a priority, along with other current complementary initiatives such as the increase of ARCS warehousing and general logistics capacity. The kits should not be restricted to household items but also include health and WatSan items.**

Finding 2 – Cooperation with external stakeholders. Based on testimonies from ICRC, ARCS and IFRC regional delegation, the cooperation between ARCS and local authorities, namely the Provincial Disaster Management Committees (PDMC) and the Afghan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA) works well. ARCS is present in most meetings and there is an understanding of their role as auxiliary to public authorities yet they remain independent enough to negotiate access to areas assigned by the joint committees. Coordination also appears to have been effective between implementation agencies (ARCS, UN bodies and NGOs). It was highlighted that agencies (UN and NGO) have resources but lack access (geographic coverage and to insecure areas), while ARCS has this access but limited resources. **Recommendation: In many contexts (Syria, Mali, DR Congo, etc.) the NS is the implementation/delivery partner of NGOs, Governmental and UN aid, sometimes through formal agreements (numerous NS-WFP contracts, for example). It is recommended that the ARCS explore such partnerships whenever possible (i.e. it may not be appropriate in contexts where UN branding would limit acceptance and access).**

Finding 3 – Health component of the DREF operation. The health response aspects of the DREF appear to have been well designed, well coordinated and efficiently delivered for the most part. Those consisted of the deployment of mobile health teams (MHTs, including deployment of teams across regions) working closely with CBHFA volunteers, psycho social support teams and hygiene promotion volunteers. Based on testimonies and reports, which were consistent across management levels and proactively shared between stakeholders, the MHTs appear to have been very relevant. Those MHTs (16 nationwide [soon 21], 7 having worked in the flood response) are one of the flagship programs of the ARCS. Each team consists of a vehicle (standard LC hardtop) staffed by a driver, a nurse (with training on vaccination), a doctor and a pharmacist. When operating, they erect a tent that serves as an OPD ward. They provide services to remote communities including hygiene promotion, OPD, MNCH, vaccination and dressing of wounds. During the relief operation, ARCS health services have reached over 18,700 beneficiaries. No outbreak occurred despite a high risk of

¹⁶ Especially meteorological disasters for which historical data is easily accessible, such as droughts and floods.

¹⁷ Around 500 HH in IFRC stocks, less than 1,000 HH in ARCS stocks based on estimate from ARCS DM (no exact number was available)

water-borne diseases. This may be attributable in part to the work of ARCS. Not all health activities planned in the EPoA will take place however, and this is due mostly to the fact that the health department was given little chance to provide input into the plan (see section 7 – Ownership of the DREF). **Recommendation: It is paramount that technical departments be allowed a fair chance to contribute to the EPoA. In this case, time was available as the bulletin was technically published four days before the generally accepted DREF request timeframes.**

Finding 4 – Relief item distributions. The volunteers and staff at the branch and community level managed to reach a good portion of the most vulnerable beneficiaries in difficult to access areas, as corroborated by local government officials and ICRC. ARCS is also well under way to reach its NFI distribution targets. There is however room for improvement. Relief distributions were inconsistent in terms of the package offered to affected households (some receiving a different variety of items than others). There were also misunderstandings between ICRC and ARCS as to what an NFI package meant (for ICRC it contains 15 items, including clothing and food, but not normally tents) When the pre-positioned stocks ran out, resupply proved somewhat ad-hoc and inconsistent. The management of bilateral contributions (namely from Qatar and Iran) also appears unsystematic¹⁸. The coordination between DM, Log, as well as with IFRC counterparts appear to have been disjointed. This may be partly explained by the fact that Branches report directly to the Secretary General, sometimes leaving intermediate HQs out of the loop. Reporting on distributions was also scarce. **Recommendation. ARCS is in a position to improve its position as lead in emergency response in Afghanistan. Efforts should continue to review ARCS response SOPs and to develop a culture of response guided by assessments and supported by a culture of collaboration between departments and Movement partners.**

Finding 5 – Management of relief stocks. Relief items (NFIs including emergency shelter materials, household items, some hygiene kits and water purification tablets) are pre-positioned at each of the 34 provincial branches, as well as the seven regional offices. The inventory is managed by ARCS provincial branches and regional office logistics. Stock updates are sent to ARCS HQ DM on a monthly basis. ARCS HQ DM then compares remaining stocks with the ARCS pre-positioning plan and orders resupply from logistics as required. The process, however, appears to not be followed rigorously. During the flood relief operations, a team from ARCS HQ was sent North to assist in planning of distributions and pledged NFIs to the coordination committee based on outdated inventories. It turned out that the NFIs pledged had already been distributed by the branches in affected regions and this led to tensions in communities that did not receive the pledged items (source: ICRC Mazar). In addition, the stock updates are not proactively shared with IFRC DM (see finding 6), even at the regional level, rendering support more challenging. At the time of the Review, IFRC was still waiting on beneficiary lists from ARCS in order to complete the replenishment process. IFRC also has room for improvement. For example the IFRC regional logistics officer in the North does not know what IFRC stocks are available in Kabul. **Recommendation: A system should be put in place for more frequent updates of relief stock inventories of ARCS and IFRC, especially in times of response. Those stock inventories should be accessible to the ARCS EOC, IFRC Log and DM in real time. The Nor RC logistics support project is working on this issue, which also needs to be part of the DM SOPs.**

Finding 6 – Flow of information. Although it appears that most information required for proper management of a relief operation exists, this information is not flowing well between the various stakeholders. Assessment reports, for example, are not usually shared with IFRC until in their final version vetted by ARCS HQ. As a result, combined with the fact that ARCS does not currently update DMIS (see finding 12), any info shared with APZ and other parties outside Afghanistan comes primarily from OCHA and other reports. This is unfortunate and a missed opportunity as ARCS members do attend most planning conferences in the field. It is especially problematic when IFRC takes on the writing of DREF request and EPoA on behalf of ARCS with partial information from the field. Communications also often take place solely between a branch president and the secretary general, bypassing key ARCS HQ functions. **Recommendation: In revising the ARCS SOPs, clear and simple processes for the mutual sharing of key information should be revised as a priority and agreed to between ARCS and IFRC management.**

Finding 7 – Beneficiary accountability. ARCS maintains regular contacts with communities at the local level and this helps inform its operations. As far as observed, there is however no formal retroaction mechanism related to relief operations, such as the possibility for beneficiaries to express their concerns or easily lodge complaints. ICRC, for example, includes a feedback form in its NFI packages, complete with a phone number to provide feedback. They receive many calls of gratitude and also grievances that they address on a case by case basis. Staff at the branch level also expressed that they would like to conduct an evaluation following the response but that there was “no money for this in DREF”. In fact there are funds for six monitoring visits in the DREF allocation budget. **Recommendations: It is**

¹⁸ Although hard to assess as not included in any of the reports available to the Reviewer

recommended that ARCS explore possibilities to adopt a more formal beneficiary accountability framework, including simple feedback mechanisms. It is also recommended that part of the budget allocated for monitoring visits be used for a final evaluation including satisfaction surveys of a random sample of beneficiaries¹⁹.

Finding 8 – Inclusion of all contributions. Neither the DREF bulletin nor the related Ops Updates (ref. G) includes a section on movement cooperation and actions by other Movement actors. In this particular case, it does not make any mention of bilateral assistance that directly contribute to the DREF operation outcomes, such as the provision of a large number of NFIs and food items by Qatar RC (at least for 500 HH as witnessed in the Mazar-e-Sharif warehouse, unmistakably related to and branded for the flood operation (see picture to the right).

Recommendation: The next Ops Update as well as the DREF final report should include all RC contributions relevant to the DREF operation outcomes (from Qatar and Iran RC, as a minimum).



Finding 9 – Minimum standards. Over 2,000 households have received material assistance from ARCS following the floods. This assistance included household items, tents, hygiene kits and some water purification items. The standard of these kits however can be improved. Hygiene kits (pictured right) for example are procured from IFRC and contain the eight standard items, while the minimum standard in Afghanistan requires 13 items, and this is well known to some beneficiaries. Distributions of sub-standard kits in this context runs may harm the reputation of ARCS. Same goes to the NFIs (see finding 4). **Recommendation:** All items distributed should meet local standards. In the case of DREF replenishment, hygiene kits, water purification items and NFIs should be procured to UN OCHA standards (required as per section 5.2 of ref. B..



The standard IFRC hygiene kit used by ARCS is not well suited to Afghanistan²⁰

Finding 10 – DREF operation budget. A review of the detailed budget for the DREF allocation²¹ further illustrates sub-optimal inputs from the field/implementation level. One example to illustrate this is the budget allocation for Mobile Health Teams (MHT). It is set at CHF1,500 per MHT for the duration of the operation, multiplied by seven MHTs (Activity A0301, budget code 540). Those are however the monthly costs of operating an MHT²². As seven MHTs are planned to operate for five months each, this leaves the health department short of CHF42,000 of the required CHF52,500 for MHTs. This does not mean that MHTs will have to stop operating but it will alter the balance of what is funded from DREF allocation versus health project funds. **Recommendation (immediate):** ARCS North Region is assuming that the overall costs of seven MHTs for 5 months are covered by the DREF allocation, this needs to be clarified. This may be true of other budget lines as well. **Recommendation (general):** For future operations, budget should be validated by the implementation level.

Finding 11 – PMER capacity. The ARCS has a new PMER department which is supported by an IFRC PMER team. So far, the ARCS PMER has been heavily involved in ARCS annual planning as well as in the production of quarterly reports. They do not yet have the resources required for monitoring or evaluation of operations and programs. Evaluations themselves are often sensitive in a hierarchical organisation such as ARCS and a culture where perceptions are very important. **Recommendation:** The strengthening of the PMER department is ongoing. Efforts should focus on Monitoring and Evaluation.

¹⁹ This may prove challenging given the limited PMER capacity – see finding 11.

²⁰ It is missing items considered as minimum by the Afghanistan WASH cluster (towel, soft cotton cloth, plastic jug for ablution, etc.). It instead includes additional items such as 12 rolls of toilet papers, shampoo and razors which are not determined by the WASH cluster as priority hygiene items

²¹ The detailed budget is not published with the DREF (ref. F) but was received from APZ

²² As described by the Regional Health Officer for ARCS North region in Mazar (Afg 66,200 + contingency, rounded up to CHF 1,500 a month).

Finding 12 – DMIS updates. The Disaster Management Information System portal is the primary tool at the disposal of affected NS to post info related to a disaster (such as updates at ref. D). This is the responsibility of the affected NS as per the Principles and Rules for Red Cross/Red Crescent Humanitarian Assistance (ref. C). The posting of DMIS reports is also a pre-condition to any DREF allocation. Posting accurate and up to date information on DMIS creates a “one stop shop” for NS wishing to access information with a view to provide assistance. In the case of ARCS, there is no clear focal point²³, partly since they see the DMIS as a Federation tool, and the DMIS updates for the 2014 floods and landslide were populated by the IFRC country office. **Recommendation: A DMIS focal point should be identified/empowered to update the platform with basic information whenever a disaster is likely to generate interest outside Afghanistan. This usually takes no more than a few minutes.**

- End of report -

²³ Although ARCS DM staff mentioned that they have access to the portal